

2006 SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY REPORT:
COTE D'IVOIRE COUNTRY REPORT

Cote d'Ivoire is a democratic republic. In 2000 Laurent Gbagbo, candidate of the Ivorian People's Front, became the country's third elected president. The election, which excluded two major parties, was marred by significant violence and irregularities. The country remained divided between the government-controlled south and the rebel New Forces-held north. The government's human rights record remained poor. The following human rights abuses were reported: restriction of citizens' right to change their government; arbitrary killings, including summary executions, by security forces, progovernment militias, and student groups; disappearances; torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and punishment by security forces, progovernment militias, and a student group; deplorable prison and detention center conditions; security force impunity; arbitrary arrest and detention; denial of fair public trial; arbitrary interference with privacy; police harassment and abuse of noncitizen Africans; restrictions on freedoms of speech, press, peaceful assembly, association, and movement; official corruption; discrimination and violence against women; female genital mutilation; child abuse and exploitation; trafficking in persons; forced labor, including by children, and child labor. Rebels were responsible for arbitrary killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, rape, and ad hoc justice.

The US strategy to promote human rights and democracy included support for national reconciliation, strengthening of the democratic process and civil society, and combating trafficking in persons and child labor. The ambassador regularly engaged the president, all political parties, and rebels to advance the political process, reconcile the country, and support free and fair elections scheduled for October 2007.

To promote democracy, the United States supported UN efforts to extend the mandates of the president and prime minister for another year and to enhance the authority of the UN high representative for elections. The United States funded a program in the troubled western region to promote reconciliation and alternative dispute resolution and continued to sponsor an NGO's efforts to strengthen the electoral commission and to provide technical advice on reforming voter registration.

To promote media freedom and freedom of speech, US officials cosponsored digital video conferences, book discussions, and roundtables for reporters and editors on the responsibilities of a free press. The ambassador frequently met with the press to discuss media freedom and human rights, met with winners of the nation's top journalism award, and underscored US support for a free

press. The United States sponsored a roundtable with leaders of local press and media monitoring organizations to discuss a code of conduct for the media and political parties and to ensure that media coverage of elections was balanced and did not generate political violence, press intimidation, or social instability. The US Government continued to fund a training program for editors and journalists to encourage professionalism and to help depoliticize an often vitriolic press. US officials hosted a gathering that resulted in the creation of a local NGO, which promoted training and professional development for a new network of female journalists. The US Government provided extensive training on HIV/AIDS reporting for radio stations.

To help public and private sector leaders strengthen civil society, the US Government utilized the international visitors program to send two members of the National Assembly to the United States on an exchange program that focused on legislative duties and the protection of minorities. During the year NGO activists, community leaders, and professionals participated in a variety of US outreach programs on conflict resolution, civic education, transparency and good governance, and women and development. The programs involved the distribution of articles and books on human rights and democracy to key contacts throughout the country. The United States sponsored the activities of a local NGO and funded training seminars on leadership development for 60 female community leaders in Korhogo and Abengourou who sought electoral office. The United States also supported a group of civil society leaders in the creation of a local NGO that promotes democratic citizenship, volunteerism, and community development at the grassroots level.

Combating corruption in the judicial system is a key criterion for restoring the country's eligibility for preferential US trade benefits. Senior US officials have repeatedly stressed concern over corruption to highlevel government representatives, including the president. After a case of judicial misconduct was resolved during the year, US officials stressed that resolving cases was insufficient and that the climate of corruption at all levels of the government and the judiciary must end. The US Government also worked closely with a local export promotion agency to underscore US concerns about corruption and child labor in the cocoa-producing sector.

To promote human rights, the US Government supported a sensitization and training program for community educators to combat female genital mutilation in the Abidjan region and in Korhogo in the north. The United States sponsored a program to provide training in health care and basic business management and education for young girls in Bouake who were forced to drop out of school because of the war. It also funded a project to open a new counseling center in Abidjan to provide rape victims, students, orphans, and displaced persons with medical, psychological, and legal assistance. US officials led a round-table discussion on the rights of disabled persons with disabled activists, municipal authorities, and community leaders.

After the 2002 rebellion, the government targeted persons perceived to be supporters, who often were Muslim, for reprisals. Strong efforts by religious and civil society groups have helped prevent the crisis from becoming a religious conflict. US officials hosted an interfaith roundtable with 50 women on ways to promote peace, reconciliation, and religious and political tolerance. The US Government sent three religious leaders - a Muslim imam, Catholic priest, and Protestant minister - to the United States on an immersion program on religious tolerance in America, with emphasis on the separation of religion and state.

To combat child labor and trafficking, the United States funded a local NGO that provided literacy and vocational training to 40 young girls in Youpougon who were trafficked into prostitution. The US Government continued to fund a child labor monitoring system that required the government to certify that cocoa beans and their products have been grown or processed without any of the worst forms of child labor. The ambassador and other US officials frequently spoke out against child labor and trafficking in conversations with government officials and rebel leaders. The US Government also continued to fund programs to end child labor in the cocoa and fishing industries and a project to help remove children from the worst forms of child labor and to enroll them in school. The US Government also supported a local NGO that promoted school enrollment and prevented child labor in a village in Oume district in the south-central region.